

CENTRAL MINE METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH
Main East-West Road
Central
Keweenaw County
Michigan

HABS MI-421
MI-421

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

CENTRAL MINE METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH

HABS No. MI-421

- Location: Facing north onto the main east-west road in Central, 750' west of the intersection with the principle north-south road of Central, Keweenaw County, Michigan.
- Present Owner: The land is owned by Universal Oil Products (UOP) and is leased by the Executive Committee of the Central Mine Methodist Episcopal Church. The church building has, by virtue of squatters' rights, become the property of the Executive Committee of the Central Mine Methodist Church.
- Present Use: The church is used for services only once a year for the Central Mine Reunion held in July or August. Otherwise, it remains locked.
- Significance: The significance of the Central Mine Methodist Episcopal Church is primarily historical. The church was built and supported totally by the mining community at Central, primarily by the Cornishmen. Although it was never affiliated with a Methodist conference, the church played an active role in the Methodist community from 1869 until the abandonment of the mines. Ever since the dispersal of the Central miners to various parts of the United States, the church has been the scene of annual reunions of residents of Central. The church stands as a reminder of the close-knit community at Central.
- Historian: Wendy Nicholas, July 1975.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Dates of Erection: 1868.
2. Architect: Not known.
3. Original and Subsequent Owners: The church was built on mine company land, but it has never actually been purchased from the company. However it is generally acknowledged that the church building belongs to the church members or to the Executive Committee of the Central Mine Methodist Episcopal Church. This committee, moreover, is not legally established. The chain of title for the land on which the church was built follows:

United States to Waterman Palmer
SE ¼ Section 23, Twp. 58N Range 31W
June 26, 1851 Vol. A, p.71.

PATENT

Waterman Palmer to John Robingson
undivided 2/3 of SE ¼ Section 23
Twp. 58N Range 31W for \$5,333.33
August 12, 1854 Book B, p. 185.

WARRANTY DEED

Waterman Palmer to Central Mining Company
undivided 1/3 of SE ¼ of Twp. 58N
Range 31W Section 23
March 28, 1855 Book B, p. 277.

WARRANTY DEED

John Robingson et al to Central Mining Company
undivided 2/3 of Section 23 SE ¼ for \$5,333.33
June 9, 1855 Book B, p. 286.

WARRANTY DEED

Central Mining Company to Frontenac Copper Company
September 7, 1905 Book O, p. 6.

WARRANTY DEED

Frontenac Copper Company to
Calumet and Hecla Mining Company
March 18, 1913 Book S, p. 79.

DEED

Universal Oil Products, successor of
Calumet and Hecla, Inc.,
to Calumet and Hecla Corporation
July 31, 1968 Book 4, pp. 245-262.

QUIT CLAIM DEED

4. Builder or Contractor, Suppliers: The Cornish miners residing at Central built their church.

5. Original plans and construction: No plans for the church were found; however, the church has been altered little. The bell tower and vestibule entrance to the rectangular nave with elevated chancel at the south end appears to be as originally planned. The basement was finished and partitioned into Sunday School rooms, the exact number undetermined.

5. Alterations and additions: The church has undergone a few minor changes. The narrow partitions between Sunday School rooms in the basement have been removed. The chimney stack and the metal pipe, which extended from the cap to a level above the roof ridge, have been dismantled such that the stack ends at the cornice line. A recent front wooden stoop replaces the former one. The new one is larger and has a railing around it, unlike its predecessor. The shed-like vestibule, which, according to a former Central resident, sheltered the basement doorway, was removed several decades ago. The pot-belly stove, which once heated the nave and chancel, has been removed, the flue covered over, and the pews re-spaced. The church also has a new bell. When the mines closed at Central, many of the miners moved south to the Atlantic mine. With them, they took their church bell. In more recent years when the church at the Atlantic mine was destroyed, the bell was taken as it sat in the Atlantic churchyard waiting to be sent back to the Central church and hung. In 1969, the bell from the Cliff mine schoolhouse was acquired and placed in the bell tower of the Central Mine M.E. Church. The sounds of a church bell once again floated throughout the hills for the 100th anniversary of the building of the Central Mine church.

B. Historical events and persons associated with this building

The Central Mine Methodist Episcopal Church served as the Cornishmen's community church from 1869 until 1898, when the Central mine was closed. God-fearing miners and their families

worshipped together on Sundays, and children learned the teachings of the Bible in the Sunday School. The Sunday School was quite active and sponsored annual picnics for the community. Christmas-time was marked by a visit from Saint Nicholas, who descended into the nave from the attic trap door, spreading gifts and good cheer.

Little remains of Central Mine today. Its residents moved away when the mine shut-down. However, because the community was so close-knit, the Central Mine residents, their descendants, and curious visitors return to the deserted settlement annually for heart-warming Homecoming or Reunion services in the church. Since 1907 former residents have been gathering for a day of worship and reminiscences.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

A. General statement

1. Architectural character: The Central Mine Methodist Episcopal Church is an extremely simple, rectangular frame building with a bell tower. It is typical of the small Protestant churches built in the nineteenth century by immigrant groups in the Copper Country. Yet the battlements on the bell tower, the buff and crimson exterior color scheme, and the interior grained woodwork make the church unique in the region (fig. 1).
2. Condition of fabric: Good.

B. Description of exterior

1. Overall dimensions: The church is rectangular in plan and measures about 26 ½ x 45 ½ feet; the attached bell tower has a ten-foot square footprint. While the church itself has a three-bay wide façade, this is hidden from view by the one bay bell tower façade and entrance. The church is one-story in height and the bell tower rises to two-stories in height.
2. Foundations: Stone walls about 30" thick.
3. Walls: The church and tower are covered with buff-painted clapboards. The corners are accentuated by red-painted, vertical corner boards, and a flat board also painted red makes up the watertable.
4. Structural system, framing: There are load-bearing masonry walls with posts and boxed beam, helping to support the nave floor in the basement. Above the basement level, there are wood frame walls and roof. The tower has been both pegged and nailed in construction.
5. Porches, stoops, balconies, bulkheads: A simple wood stoop with rail spans the width of the bell tower in front of the entrance. It is three steps above grade.
6. Chimneys: One rectangular brick chimney-stack is located on the west wall of the church between the two northernmost bays. Above the roof level, however, the chimney has been dismantled. Formerly both main floor and basement stoves were connected to the outside stack.
7. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: The bell tower vestibule is entered through double doors in the north facade. The doorway is a free interpretation of classic framing elements, including tapering pilasters, abaci, and entablature. The wood doors are painted red with four buff recessed panels. Above is a four paned overlight. The sills and frames are wood as is the cornice above the overlight. A narrow, four paneled wood door provides access to the cellar from the central bay of the south facade. It is set into the thick foundation wall. The sill, frames, and lintel are all of flat board.

b. Windows and shutters: There are no shutters. The main body of the church has three six-over-six double sash windows lighting the nave from both the east and west walls. The panes are clear glass. On the south, east, and west facades, there are two fixed windows with nine panes lighting the basement. The reveals are embrasures. These windows have been boarded up. Four windows are present at the second-story level of the bell tower, one on each facade. On the north and east facades are located six-over-six, double sash windows. An eighteen paned single sash window lights the tower from the west. The south window has been boarded up. All sills, frames, and lintels consist of simple red-painted flat boards.

8. Roof:

a. Shape, covering: A low gable with rolled composition roofing tops the main body of the church. The tower has a slightly sloping roof with red-painted, wood battlements at the edges. The covering has not been determined.

b. Cornice, eaves: The building has boxed eaves and a boxed cornice with frieze and a return at the south gable end. The cornice line continues around the bell tower at the eave level, providing a continuous line of red and yellow around the whole structure.

c. Dormers, cupolas, towers: A single bay, two stage bell tower projects from the central bay of the north facade. It is completely enclosed with clapboard siding. The roof is flat with wooden battlements lining the edge. Three windows light the topmost level.

C. Description of interior

1. Floor plans: The church is entered from the north through the bell tower. A center aisle with simple pews on either side leads one to an elevated chancel at the south end of the church. The chancel, a raised platform that spans the width of the church, has chairs for the choir on the west half and the organ and minister's walnut podium on the west. Along the northern edge of the chancel is a balustrade with turned wood balusters. The balustrade turns down either side of the two steps to the nave floor, ending in handsome newel posts. In the southeast corner of the bell tower vestibule is the ladder up to the bell. A small 4' x 5' room has been created around the ladder, with an entrance in the north partition. Beneath the nave is a full basement once used for the Sunday School classes. Access is only from the outside through a door in the south wall. A trap door in the center of the church ceiling gives entrance to the attic, although the main access is from the second level of the bell tower.

2. Stairways: There are no stairs in the church, only a ladder to the bell tower.

3. Flooring: All floors, both in the basement and main floor of the church are of unfinished wood planks. The chancel and aisle of the nave are carpeted.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: The basement and nave have wainscoting of wide boards laid horizontally, with white painted plaster above the dado and on the ceilings. In the nave the wainscoting has been artificially grained with a yellow/buff colored base. In the bell tower the wainscoting is a combination of four-inch wide planks laid vertically with one-foot wide horizontal planks as baseboard and dado. The boards are either grained or painted black. Walls above the dado and the ceiling are white plaster. The walls of the tower ladder are board and batten, grained. Boards in the basement are painted green.

5. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: Double doors lead into the nave from the bell tower. They are narrow, four-panel doors grained to match the wainscoting and pews. They are hung on heavy double hinges to allow the doors to swing both ways. Doorways are frame. A narrow (2' x 6') door consisting of two vertical grained planks opens into the bell tower ladder room.

6. Decorative features and trim: All woodwork inside the church, with the exception of the white painted molding at the intersection of the nave walls and ceiling and the chancel balustrade, is artificially grained with a light oak base.

7. Hardware: None.

8. Mechanical equipment:

a. Heating: The church was heated by wood stoves. An open grate is located in the center of the church to allow heat to rise from the basement stove. An iron potbelly stove remains in the basement, although it is no longer connected to the chimney. This wood or coal burning stove, called Warrior No. 20, was the creation of the Detroit Stove Works. The building is not heated today.

b. Lighting: The church is lit by kerosene lights. Above the center aisle are two gilded metal chandeliers with accommodations for four lights apiece. On the south wall of the church there are two bracket and holders for lamps. A few electrical outlets have been installed in order to facilitate cleaning.

c. Plumbing: None.

D. Site

The church is one of very few structures left of the Central Mine village. It was built on a hill which slopes off to the south and can be seen rising up amongst shrubs and trees from a good distance. Several of the Central Mine roads, although of dirt, remain in good repair. The church faces north on the principle east-west road. One hundred yards to the west stand two clapboard houses, inhabited only during the summer and hunting season.

1. Historic landscape design: Elevated views of Central Mine location indicate that the area was quite barren. A sloping plain virtually devoid of trees and shrubs was dotted with houses, shops,

and public and mine buildings. The church lies at the western end of the settlement in the section of Central formerly known as Winthrop. Miners' houses primarily surrounded the church.

2. Outbuildings: There is one outhouse off the southeast corner of the church.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Primary sources:

Deeds are in the Keweenaw County Courthouse in Eagle River, Michigan.

Interview with Mr. Charles Stetter, 216 Pewabic Street, Laurium. Stetter is principle of the Calumet High School, chairman of the Executive Committee of the Central Mine Methodist Church, and long-time summer resident of the Clerk's House at Central. July 24, 1975, August 4, 1975.

Exterior photo of Central Mine M.E. Church, Eighth Reunion, August 2, 1914 in #16 of Clarence Bennetts Collection in the archives at Michigan Technological University, Houghton, Michigan.

B. Likely sources not yet investigated:

The Sunday School records and financial accounts of the church are in the possession of Charles Stetter.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

Documentation was done in the summer of 1975 by Kevin Harrington and Wendy Nicholas for the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER), a division of the National Park Service.

Fig. 1 Exterior views of church. Photos by author, 1975.

